

ANECDOTA SCOWAH



NUMBER THREE

To the Hon
B. Ray Schaner
a man with a keen
sense of humor and
justice.

Trinity Cal

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DEMOCRITUS

ANECDOTA SCOWAH NUMBER THREE

THE ANCIENT GREEKS



JOE MILLER

BY ALBERT RAPP



A PROLEGOMENON

By NAT SCHMULOWITZ

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The manner of jesting ought not to be extravagant or immoderate, but refined and witty.

CICERO, DE OFFICIIS

We are all Greeks. Our laws, our literature, our arts have their root in Greece.

SHELLEY, INTRODUCTION TO HELLAS

*Though I fly to Istambol
Athens holds my heart and soul
Can I cease to love thee? No!*

ξῶν μου, σᾶς ἀγαπῶ.

LORD BYRON, MAID OF ATHENS

But, for my own part, it was Greek to me.

JULIUS CAESAR, ACT I, SCENE 2

Wit and wisdom are born with a man.

SELDEN

Not a word with him, but a jest. And every jest but a word.

LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST, ACT II, SCENE 1

I live in a constant endeavor to fence against the evils of life by mirth, being firmly persuaded that every time a man smiles—but much more so when he laughs—it adds something to this fragment of life.

STERNE'S DEDICATION OF TRISTRAM SHANDY

Laughter will now lovingly accompany you wherever you go and never allow you to be glum.

THE GOLDEN ASS, LUCIUS APULEIUS

ANECDOTA SCOWAH NUMBER THREE

PROLEGOMENON TO "THE ANCIENT GREEKS AND JOE MILLER"



*Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent
their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.*

ACTS 17:12

IS THERE ANYTHING NEW under the sun? The jests, witticisms, and proverbs of modern nations appear to be the echoes of similar thoughts of the nations that preceded them and the latter, in turn, but repetitious of even earlier bon mots and sayings.

The more we become familiar with the world's wit and humor the more they appear to be immortal. Sparkling wit and merry jokes never die, but pass through a thousand transformations and reappear again and again in new topical forms.

William Mathews, in his *Wit and Humor, Their Use and Abuse* (1888), wrote:

"Perhaps if we could trace the entire history of some of the pleasantries and conceits which have provoked our loudest merriment, we should find them stereotyped on the crockery tablets of an Assyrian council, or eternized in the hieroglyphs of an Egyptian record. Who knows but that the very same 'old joes' which tickle the risibles of the laborer of today may have split the sides of the men who built the Pyramids, or of the workmen at the Tower of Babel? As an

American journalist observes, 'It is a strange, if not a solemn thought, that the American of to-day may be laughing at jokes which can hardly have been fresh when the Glacial period came to an end, and the Cave-men were wagging their dolichocephalous heads at one another, and working their prognathous jaws over their banquets of raw meat.' "

What was the first jest in the Garden of Eden? E. V. Lucas in his *Mixed Vintages* speculated as to the first joke after Creation. He had no doubt "as to the subject matter of that distant pleasantry" and declared "it was the face of the other person involved. . . . The great face joke . . . obviously came first because there were in the early days none of the materials for the other staple quips—such as alcohol and sausages and wives' mothers. Faces, however, were always there." Lucas might have directed his speculation to another subject if Adam had died with all his original ribs. Apropos of Adam, if he came on earth again, the only thing he would probably recognize would be the old jokes. It was Mark Twain who wrote, "What a good thing Adam had—when he said a good thing he knew nobody had said it before."

It was practically fore-ordained that one of the early issues of ANECDOTA SCOWAH would be devoted to Greek joemillers. Both A. S. ONE and A. S. TWO contain prognostic references to Philogelos.

The ancient Greeks were a gelastic people—laughter loving. They not only had the word for it, but also the wit.

Prof. Albert Rapp's learned and instructive monograph about the ancient Greeks and their own joemillers serves to disclose that serious minded men occasionally dedicate themselves to thorough research in the field of gelotica, notwithstanding the opinion of some that the study of jokes is not in keeping with the dignity, pride and wisdom associated with academic erudition and scholarship.

Many historical figures collected jest books, or themselves supplied the materials for others to compile them. In his *Offices*, Cicero wrote: "Many collections have likewise been made by various writers of humorous sayings, such as that made by Cato and called his *Apophthegms*." In turn, Tiro, Cicero's faithful freed-man and secretary, anthologized Cicero's wise-cracks and witty

sayings. That Cicero had a cheerful wise-cracking disposition and enjoyed the companionship of kindred souls is revealed in a warm friendly letter he wrote to his friend Atticus in Epirus about 60 B.C.: "As I go down to the forum surrounded by troops of friends, I can find no one out of all that crowd with whom to jest freely."

Stratonicus, the famous Greek wit of the Fourth Century, B.C., to whom Prof. Rapp refers, was reactivated by Athenaeus (Second Century, A.D.) through the medium of an anthology of jests.

The appendix contains examples of Greek wit in addition to those given by Prof. Rapp. These were found in F. A. Paley's *Greek Wit, A Collection of Smart Sayings and Anecdotes*, translated from the Greek prose writers and published in London in 1880. In his preface to the first edition, Paley declared that these examples were "not commonly known, nearly all of them being taken from writers little read in the schools." Paley justified their inclusion in his book as examples of wit, which he described as "a peculiar phase of cleverness possessed by few but one that is greatly appreciated by all who are not themselves dunces."

In the preface to his second series of Greek wit (1881), Paley wrote: "Two things are to be considered in estimating Greek wit; first, that it comes to us under some disadvantage in translation; secondly, that what was wit to a Greek has not necessarily the same degree of cleverness or originality to us."

Stephen Leacock, who was Professor Emeritus of McGill University, in his essay on "What Is Good Latin?" declares:

"For Greek I hold no brief. It is only for Philologists and Apostles." Then he adds (suggesting some degree of concurrence with Paley): "Personally, I only know one department of literature in which I feel the full right of opinion, that of the literature of humor. To my mind the wit of Aristophanes is about as funny as the jokes of a village cut-up."

Historically, we accredit to the ancient Greeks the attribute of wisdom. Notwithstanding Leacock's apathetic or half-hearted attitude toward Greek humor, should not the epigraph on history's monument to ancient Greek wisdom include a reference to their wit and their love of laughter? Is not a

wise man known by much laughing? So declares the paradoxologist in John Dunton's *Athenian Sport or Two Thousand Paradoxes Merrily Argued to Amuse and Divert the Age* (1707).

"PARADOX LXII. THAT A WISE MAN IS KNOWN BY MUCH LAUGHING.

"RIDE, SI SAPIs, O PUELLA RIDE; if thou be'st wise, laugh; for since the powers of discourse, reason and laughter be equally proper unto Man only, why shall not he be only most wise, who hath most use of laughing, as well as he who hath most of reasoning and discoursing?

"I always did and shall understand that adage, PER RISUM MULTUM POSSIS COGNOSCERE STULTUM, that by much laughing thou may'st know there is a fool, not that the laughers are fools, but that among them there is some fool at whom wise men laugh; which moved Erasmus to put this as his first argument in the mouth of his Folly, that she made beholders laugh; for fools are the most laughed at, and laugh the least themselves of any.

"And Nature saw this faculty to be so necessary in Man, that she hath been content that by more causes we should be importuned to laugh, than to the exercise of any other power; for things in themselves, utterly contrary, beget this effect; for we laugh both at witty and absurd things. At both which sorts I have seen men laugh so long, and so earnestly, that at last they have wept that they could laugh no more.

"And therefore the Poet having described the quietness of a wise retir'd Man, saith, QUID FACIT CANIUS TUUS? RIDET.

"We are told that even the extremity of laughing, yea of weeping also, hath been accounted wisdom. And that Democritus and Heraclitus, the lovers of these extremes, have been called LOVERS OF WISDOM. Now among our wise men I doubt not, but many would be found who would laugh at Heraclitus' weeping, none who weep at Democritus' laughing.

"At the hearing of Comedies, or other witty reports, I have noted some who not understanding Jest, etc., have yet chosen this as the best means to seem wise and understanding, to laugh when their companions laugh; and I have presumed them ignorant, whom I have seen unmov'd. *Thus, a wise man is known by much laughing.*

"A wise man that knows at what to laugh, and a valiant man that dares laugh; for he that laughs is justly reputed more wise than him that he laughs at. What is our superstitious civility of manners, but a mutual tickling Flattery of one another? Almost every man affecteth an humour of Jestings, and is content to become fool to no other end, but to give his wise companion occasion to laugh; and to laugh is so common to wise men, that I think all wise men (if any such read this Paradox) will laugh both at it and at me."

We add the comment of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., "There is nothing like a paradox to take the scum off your mind."

SCOWAH is again honored and served with a definitive contribution of an important branch on the tree of knowledge, concerning wit and humor in the form of jests. That Prof. Albert Rapp is eminently qualified to have made this contribution is evident from his background.

Albert Rapp is perhaps best known for his theory of Wit and Humor. This was first advanced in the *Journal of Social Psychology* in 1949 in an article entitled "A Phylogenetic Theory of Wit and Humor," and developed more fully in *The Origins of Wit and Humor*, published in 1951 by E. P. Dutton and Company.

He is Professor of Classical Languages at the University of Tennessee. In addition to articles and papers on the psychology of Humor, he has written extensively on the Humor of the Ancients. Among the titles are: *The Genealogy of Baron Munchausen*, *Tall Tales from the Greeks*, *The Dawn of Humor*, and *The Lady and the Wit*.

NAT SCHMULOWITZ

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THE ANCIENT GREEKS AND JOE MILLER

BY ALBERT RAPP



THAT THE ANCIENT GREEKS were gay and laughter loving needs little proof. Perhaps one thinks immediately of the stage comedies of Aristophanes. There were numerous comedies (unfortunately now lost) of other playwrights; some of which were judged superior, in actual competition, to those of Aristophanes.

Even in the serious literary forms of the Greeks, humor continually bursts forth. In the *Iliad*, that dignified epic story of the Trojan War, scenes of bloody combat are regularly relieved by the mirthful antics of gods and goddesses on Mount Olympus. What is perhaps the most poignant scene in the *Iliad*, Hector's farewell to his wife and child, is carefully interwoven with humor. It constitutes a classic of the "laughter and tears" class.

Surely historiography should be serious. Yet the Greek historians so often included tongue-in-cheek stories and tall tales that Lucian decided to write a parody on them, and he entitled it the *True History*. In the *True History* Lucian describes with straight face his amusing adventures on his journey to the moon and later in the belly of a whale.

Even philosophy—the most serious cerebrations of Plato are salted with a touch of wit. In the *Apology* and the *Phaedo*, for example, he represents Socrates as going to his martyrdom with a smile and a humorous comment nearly every step of the way.

Their serious literary forms, as well as their great body of lighter literary forms, attest to this urge for the gay and the frivolous in this well-rounded and gifted race.

Laughter was considered not only pleasant of itself, but it was held to have therapeutic value, to perform a sort of mental hygiene; a theory only recently being proposed by psychoanalysts. In the fragment known as the *Tractatus Coislinianus*, there is a definition of Comedy which goes in part as follows: "Comedy is the imitation of an action . . .; through pleasure and laughter affecting the purgation of the like emotions." The relation to Aristotle's definition of Tragedy is very apparent. In Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis* this is repeated: "When we witness the emotions of others, in both Comedy and Tragedy, we halt our own emotions, and are purged of them."*

For whatever reason, the formal and informal writings of the Greeks abound in wit and humor. They also deliberately cultivated and pursued *spontaneous* wit in everyday life, repartee, ad-libbed gags and what we would call "wise cracks." Skill in these was held in great esteem; it was presumed to be a natural by-product of a liberal education. In some areas at any rate it was methodically inculcated during early youth. This love of spontaneous wit seems to have manifested itself through all strata of society, in philosophers and kings, in commoners and prostitutes.

In Athens, for example, there was at least one private club, known as the Sixty Club, which assembled at regular meetings and held "jam sessions" in wit. Their extemporaneous gags were quoted widely. They finally reached the notice of the mighty king and conqueror, Philip the Great. Philip sent them a large sum of money to have their jests recorded and brought to him.

In Sparta, of all places, this was part of the early training of the young men; though here there were the expected laconic qualifications and utilitarian emphases.

Plutarch says, in his Biography of Lycurgus, that young men were expected to eat at the public mess halls "where they would see the instructive models of

*Translations by Lane Cooper in *An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy*, New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1922. These quotations are from pages 83 and 224.

liberal training; and where they too became accustomed to sport and jest without obscenity; and to endure kidding without resentment. However, if anyone could not endure it, he had only to ask, and the jester stopped."

As to the special qualities of Spartan wit, one may gather that it was curt and direct, and that there was serious reflection back of it. Aimless or frivolous laughter, or the laugh for a laugh's sake, was frowned upon. As Plutarch says: "And even from their jests it is possible to judge of their character. For it was their habit never to talk at random, and to let slip no word which did not contain some thought."

Plutarch gives an example. A Spartan, he says, was invited to hear a man imitate a nightingale. "Thank you," he said, "but I've heard the bird itself."

Sosibius states that Lycurgus actually dedicated a statue to Laughter, who was then venerated as a god, and that Lycurgus introduced "seasonable" laughter into their drinking parties in order to make more palatable their physical hardships and their meagre menu.

Sosicrates, author of a History of Crete, had this to say of the people of Phaestos: "For it is known that they cultivate the habit of saying witty things from earliest boyhood. Because of this training they readily create *bon mots*. So all the inhabitants of Crete ascribe wit to them."

The people of Tiryns were so laughter loving that, according to Theophrastus, they were useless in their serious business. So they decided to have recourse to the oracle at Delphi and ask how to rid themselves of this disability. The oracle replied that they must cast a bull into the sea in honor of Poseidon and not crack a smile. This sounded like a reasonable request; for surely if they would laugh in the midst of a religious service they were hopeless. Even so, to play extra safe, they sent away all the children. It didn't work. At the key moment, when they were pitting their strength against that of a bull, a young ragamuffin broke in and made a wry comment. They all burst into laughter and decided to quit trying not to.

Every reader of ancient literature is familiar with the numerous portrayals of what are commonly called "parasites," or "flatterers." These were largely quasi-professional comedians who earned their way through life because of

their skill at witty chatter. As soon as he arrived at the dinner table, according to Eupolis, "the flatterer must at once begin his witty chatter or be chucked out the door." In some cases, their jests were recorded and published; as, for example, those of the jester known as "Lark," parasite to one of the Ptolemys.

The best way to maintain high standards is to reward excellence; and at least the next best way is immediate and exemplary punishment for failure. A good parasite could hope to find an easy life at some royal court or at the home of some wealthy litterateur. The rules were strict. One joker, who (we are told) "uttered an outrageous jest," was put into a heavy wooden collar and given over to the authorities to be thrown into a pit.

Among the many collections of witty sayings, we find one by a famous musician, Stratonicus, a harp player. It is not recorded that this Stratonicus was put in a wooden collar and cast into a pit. The following gags are attributed to him.

1. When he started to go to bed he would ask his slave to bring him a drink. "Not so much because I am thirsty," he said, "but because I don't want to be thirsty."

2. One day he met an acquaintance whose shoes were smartly polished, and he expressed his sympathy that the man was broke. "How did you guess I was broke?" said his acquaintance. "Because," said Stratonicus, "your shoes would not be so nicely polished, if you had not had to do the job yourself." No further comment is needed on the then current labor standards.

3. The next one deserves a brief introduction. Central New York State is a well-known snow belt. The natives of the region have a standing gag about its climate. They say that it consists of "ten months of winter and two months of poor sledding." Apparently, Stratonicus said something like it first. Referring to the climate of Aenos in Thrace he said they had eight months of frost and the other four of winter.

4. Once, in Byzantium, Stratonicus went to a recital given by a singer who accompanied himself on the harp. The singer did an excellent job with the Prelude, and then proceeded to botch up the remaining songs on the program. When he was through, Stratonicus got up and made an announcement to the

audience: "Whoever will reveal the hiding place of the singer who sang the Prelude will receive one thousand drachmas."

There were also collections of witty sayings of prostitutes. No doubt these were of the more educated hetairae. In fact, that a good sense of wit sprang naturally from a liberal education is clearly implied in the following statement by Athenaeus: "Gnathaena was very quick at repartee. There were other courtesans, too, who thought very highly of themselves, and who went in for culture and devoted their time to learned studies; hence these, too, were quick at repartee."

Many of these "wise cracks" are difficult to repeat, partly because they involve puns and are therefore untranslatable; partly because they are untranslatable for other reasons.

One example of punning will suffice. The famous Phryne is said to have been courted by a stingy lover. He was a little irked by her financial demands. Whether to kid her, or to flatter her, or more likely to do both at once, one day he called her "Praxiteles' little Aphrodite." (Now "Praxiteles" also means "exacting a price.") Phryne came right back and said: "And, you my dear, are Phidias' little Eros." (Phidias also means "saving your money.")

The wittiest of hetairae seems to have been Gnathaena. There were at least two separate collections of her jests, one by Machon and one by Lynceus.

1. To her is attributed that ancient gag about old wine. When a lover poured her some wine and said that it was sixteen years old, she remarked: "Small for its age, isn't it?" This gag must have been a popular one. It is also attributed to Phryne.

This kidding at the expense of one's lover filled several functions. In this particular case it no doubt encouraged more liberality. In any case, it served as a sort of love play, about like playful fighting.

2. For example, one of Gnathaena's ardent lovers was the playwright Diphilus. One day when he was being served drinks at her house, he asked her how she kept the wine so cold. Said she: "Oh, we pour in one of your plays."

3. Once Gnathaena was having dinner at the house of another courtesan called Dexithea. Dexithea kept setting aside all the choicest portions to take

to her mother. Finally Gnathaena said: "You know, I should have had dinner with your mother instead of you."

Even grave and hoary philosophers partook this generous sprinkling of Attic salt. Democritus, the so-called "Laughing Philosopher," thought all life was funny. Socrates gave a name (irony) to an entire class of humor. The great Diogenes carried a bright spark not only in his lantern but in his heart. What sort of gags? Well, here are some.

1. One day, watching a very bad archer practice, Diogenes sat directly in front of the target. "Hey, what are you sitting there for?" "So as not to get hit," he replied.

2. Once when a non-bibber lectured him for drinking in a tavern, he replied: "Well, I get my hair cut in a barbershop."

3. On one other occasion he saw the child of a prostitute throwing stones into a crowd. "Careful," he said, "you might hit your father."

4. In a temple on the island of Samothrace, a spectator was expressing astonishment over the large number of votive offerings. "There would be lots more," said Diogenes, "if those who were *not* saved could set up offerings."

5. When he was asked how he wanted to be buried, Diogenes said, "Face downwards." "Why?" he was asked. Said the wise and prophetic philosopher, two thousand two hundred years before our day: "Because in a while everything will be upside down." I can't be sure whether that one is really very funny.

6. Finally, when a lecturer had been reading his paper endlessly, Diogenes looked over and saw that the scroll was coming to a large white space with no more writing on it. He turned to the audience and said: "Cheer up, men, there's land in sight."



What has all this to do with Mottley's Joe Miller? Nothing, probably. However, there has come down to us a collection of Greek jokes, in fact a "Greek joke book," which can very well claim to be the fore-runner of Joe Miller* and for which this very claim has been made. The title of the collection is *Philogelos*** ("laughter loving"). These jokes were once widely current in

*See *Anecdota Scowah* No. 2.

**See supplementary Notes, *post*.

Europe. There were many printings of them and frequent translations. They seem to occupy a position of considerable significance in the history of Wit and Humor.

First, to examine the contents.

If you were to read the stories of this joke book, your immediate surprise would probably be to meet with that very familiar and nowadays threadbare character, the absent-minded professor. Joke Number 2, for example:

There were twin brothers. One of them died. Some time later, a professor met the survivor, and he said to him: "Let me see, was it you who died, or was it your brother?"

The word I have translated "professor" is σχολαστικός. The eighteenth century translator who wrote for the *Gentleman's Magazine* uses "pedant" and so does Bubb in his translation of 1920. The word pedant, which once meant simply "teacher," now carries connotations of one who makes a display of book learning. This ruins the wit and is unwarranted in the stories. *Scholastikos* may fairly be translated either "scholar" or "professor."

Absent-mindedness today has become the one single comic theme in a deluge of professor stories. But in the *Philogelos* the *scholastikos* is a much more complex and fully drawn character. He is, for example, a believer in research and experimentation.

A professor decided to train his jackass to get along without eating, by gradually cutting down his feed. When the animal dropped dead of starvation, he said: "What a great loss I have suffered. Just when he had learned not to eat, he died." (No. 9.)

The true scholar, then as now, was very careful in evaluating his sources. He would not be deceived by mere appearances.

A professor met a certain friend and said: "Why, I heard that you were dead!" The fellow replied: "Well, you see that I'm alive." The professor said: "But, I assure you, the man who told me is much more dependable than you." (No. 22.)

A professor, a bald-headed man and a barber were traveling together, and they had to sleep out in a lonely section. They agreed that each in turn would stay awake for four hours to guard their possessions. It was the barber's turn first. Wishing to play a joke, he shaved the head of the professor while he was asleep. When his watch was over, he roused the professor. The professor, rubbing his head as he awoke, discovered that it was bare. He said: "Why, that big scoundrel, the barber! By mistake he has wakened the bald-headed man instead of me." (No. 56.)

There are few things which exasperate the layman quite as much as the true scholar's insistence upon viewing the actual evidence.

A professor who was sick abed became very hungry. When told that it was not yet dinner time, he refused to believe his servants, and ordered the sun-dial to be brought in. (No. 75.)

The *scholastikos*, who lives in a world of books, is apt to have too few dealings with his fellow man. He is therefore occasionally a trifle weak on his Emily Post.

A professor was invited to a wedding banquet. When it came time to leave, he said to the groom: "Good luck, and may you have many more." (No. 72.)

It is a curious thing that by long tradition the man of intellect is depicted as hopelessly lost when he strays into the world of business, as occasionally he must.

A professor was selling a horse. A prospective buyer came and began examining the horse's teeth. The professor said: "Why do you look at his teeth? If only he could trot as well as he eats!" (No. 37.)

He is no better off when he sets out to apply correct business principles.

A professor who had a house to sell went around carrying a stone from the house to show as a sample. (No. 3.)

As ever, the honest savant has a mind of his own. He dislikes being in agreement with the commonality of mankind. His notorious attribute of being "otherwise-minded" is kidded in the following story.

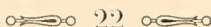
A professor was looking at a pair of twins. When some of the people about were marvelling at their likeness, the professor said: "Well, this one is not quite so much like that one, as that one is like this one."
(No. 101.)

These are a few examples of the ancestors of our absent-minded professor gags. In number the *scholastikos* jokes constitute about two fifths of the entire collection. There is a considerable quantity of comic flaws represented. The essential quality which is ridiculed in almost all of them is a sort of unconsciousness of what the world calls "reality," but what we and Plato know are mere "shadows" or "illusions" of reality.

As to the identity of the *scholastikos*, he may be taken to be either a scholar or a teacher. In one story he is represented as teaching a class (No. 61) (primary grade, incidentally). But it may mean he was *also* a teacher: as in other stories in which (for example) the *scholastikos* is also a physician (No. 3) or a money lender (No. 50). The fact that he is ever also a money lender makes it seem rather unlikely that "*scholastikos*" means "teacher," though of course times differ.

Strangely enough, one gets the impression at times that he is very young; as in the stories where his parents appear (*e.g.*, Nos. 45, 49). This makes it a temptation to suggest that the absent-minded professor of today is only the fuddle-witted student of yesterday. In most cases he seems older and, in general, *scholastikos* seems to denote anyone of almost any age who is extremely given to "book larnin" and who is therefore a trifle "batty" and unconsciously funny.

As opposed to the unconscious funniness of the *scholastikos*, there is a class of stories told of a character who is known as the "wit" or *eutrapelos*. Here we have deliberate cleverness, a smart remark, or a keen bit of repartee such as you would never expect to find in the scholar or professor. The classic of these is the following:



A wit was asked once by a chattering barber: "How shall I cut your hair?"

*The wit replied: "In silence." (No. 148.)**

The following episode, also starring the quick-witted person, is one which clearly reflects ancient pagan life and helps us to place the origin of these stories. The "scraper" is of course the Greek *xystra* (Latin *strigilis*) which we used to remove perspiration after a steam bath.

At the baths two men asked a wit if they could borrow scrapers from him. The wit knew one to be a thief, but did not know the second man at all. To their requests the wit replied: "Knowing you, I shan't lend it; and, not knowing you, I shan't lend it." (No. 150.)

Another stock character is the braggart, *alazon*. The medium *par excellence* for this character is of course the comic stage. Here he has a long and distinguished history, including among others, the *Miles Gloriosus* of Plautus, Shakespeare's *John Falstaff* and in our century George Kelly's *The Show Off*. In these brief jokes one is limited to a single instance of braggadocio, and the essence of the charm and wit lies in seeing this comic flaw deflated.

A braggart, walking in the market place, saw his servant who had just come in from the country. The braggart called out: "Hello! How goes it on my sheep ranch?" The servant replied: "One sheep is lying down, asleep. The other is standing up." (No. 108.)

*(*Editor's Note.*) Here is an example of how an ancient Greek jest with the redeeming attribute of brevity, besides its wit, was blown up in a modern jest book of after dinner stories, entitled *Here's A New One* (1913).

"How will you have your hair cut, sir?" said a talkative barber to the man in the chair.

"Minus conversational prolixity.

"With abbreviated or totally eliminated narration."

"—er—don't quite catch your meaning, sir."

"With quiescent mandibulars,"

"Which?"

"Without effervescent verbosity," impatiently exclaimed the customer, who was rapidly showing signs of anger because the tonsorial artist in charge of the second chair had failed to grasp the import of his explanations.

"Sir?"

"Let diminutive colloquy be conspicuous by its absence."

The hairdresser scratched his head thoughtfully for a second and then went over to the proprietor of the shop with the whispered remark: "I don't know whether that gentleman in my chair is mad or a foreigner, but for the life of me I cannot find out in what style he wants his hair cut."

The proprietor went to the waiting customer and said politely: "My assistant doesn't seem to understand you, sir. How would you like your hair cut?"

"In silence."

(N.S.)

All of these stories and most of the others in the *Philogelos* swing around stock characters. Since the joke is a pint-size medium economy of characterization is essential. Hence the importance of keeping on hand typed characters which we can all instantly recognize.

So we have our gallery of quickly recognizable persons: the traveling salesman, the absent-minded professor, the Irishman, the Scotchman, the Englishman. Corresponding to the latter national comic types, there appear in the *Philogelos* stories kidding the inhabitants of certain cities. The people of Cumae, for example, seem to have won a place in the comedy gallery where they were represented as being morons and dumbbells. The following stories are told of them:

In Cumae they were conducting funeral rites for a distinguished man. A newcomer walked in and asked the spectators: "Who is the departed?" A Cumaeon turned around and said to him, pointing: "The one lying on the bier." (No. 154.)

A certain man asked a Cumaeon shopkeeper where Dracontides, the rhetorician lived. The Cumaeon said: "I am alone. But if you will watch my shop, I'll go along and show you." (No. 170.)

It is always interesting to see what jokes offend in one culture and apparently not in another. In general there are broad variations in this respect from age to age and even from one country to another. There are two series of jokes in the *Philogelos* which would be offensive to us; so much so that the jokes would not be regarded as funny. They are the stories poking fun at people who are ruptured and of people with foul breath. The latter are for the most part so distasteful that they tend to inhibit our laughter. The former are also often revolting, but in addition they bring out from us enough sympathetic pain to inhibit our laughter. There seems to be, in other words, in our time and particularly in our immediate society a greater sensitivity to pain in other people. Our limits of disgust have broadened or at least have shifted.

To men, at any rate, it is always interesting to see how women are treated. As we know today there is a broad range of comic qualities attributed to

women. They are kidded for their alleged gold digging, gossiping, nagging and peculiarities in driving a car and for many other mirth-provoking qualities. In the *Philogelos* the range of feminine comic flaws is extremely narrow. This seems not to be due to superior courtesy or deference nor to lack of interest in the female character.

A young man said to his warm-blooded wife: "Wife, what shall we do? Shall we have breakfast, or devote ourselves to Aphrodite?" She replied: "As you prefer. We haven't a bite to eat." (No. 244.)

A young man invited two lecherous old women to his house. He said to his servants: "Mix wine for one; and devote to Aphrodite whichever one prefers that." Both women spoke up: "We're not thirsty." (No. 245.)

These just about exhaust the comic treatment of women. There are in addition several stories told about women-hating men and these are rather bitter, for the most part. Among the jokes which demonstrate this, if in mild form, is the one about the drunk who went into mourning.

A drunk was sitting in a saloon drinking wine, when a man rushed in and said: "Your wife is dead." The drunk called to the waiter and said: "Waiter, take away this wine. Bring me an order of the dark wine instead." (No. 227.)

These constitute a fair sample of the 264 jokes in the *Philogelos*. While jokes are notoriously poor to read, in comparison with the same jokes skilfully told, these stories are fairly well executed. They are brief, compact, built up to their climax. In only a few of the jokes is there a superfluous phrase or one which weakens the effect of the punch line.

It will be noted that in spite of the ephemeral nature of jokes (one may test this by picking up a joke book of twenty years ago) and in spite of the difficulties of transition from one culture to another, many of these are fairly fresh and some are still around today in modern dress.

Many have probably heard of the man who received a letter from a friend asking for money. He ignored the letter. Long afterwards, when they met, he

remarked: "I never received that letter you sent asking for money." A version of this story appears twice in the *Philogelos*. (No. 17, 44b).

The following is, without any doubt, a coincidence. Some years ago, (I believe it was in the early '30s) they were having trouble in New York City because of over-enthusiastic police department procedures and third-degree methods. One of the comedy magazines ran a cartoon with the legend somewhat as follows:

Policeman (leading in prisoner): "He has confessed to murder." Police Captain: "Good. Hold him till there is one."

In the *Philogelos*, our old friend the professor is the villain this time.

A professor who taught in an elementary school looked suddenly to the corner of the room, and shouted: "Dionysius is disorderly in the corner." Then someone spoke up and said that Dionysius had not yet arrived, and the professor replied: "Very well, then. When he does come." (No. 61.)

Alfred Eberhard, the German editor of the latest and best edition of *Philogelos*, states in his introduction:

"Although I had observed many adaptations of these stories here and there, I was unwilling to make a collection of these, nor would I have been able. For it would have been an immense job, thoroughly tiring and completely useless, for a person to undertake to wade through the jokebooks written in Latin, Italian, German and French. In fact I started once, but I soon gave it up. According to Dunlop, Richard Porson is said to have planned to edit at some time a certain English book known as Joe Miller, with a commentary in which he planned to show that all the jokes had been taken from Greek writers and particularly from Hierocles. But this he never did."

That John Mottley took all his joemillers from Hierocles and other Greeks I consider very unlikely. In fact, I found very few of the jokes that I could trace to any Greek source. But if one examines the English "jest books" before Joe Miller's, beginning with *The XII Mery Jests of the Wyddow Edyth* (1525), and *A Hundred Mery Tayls* (1526), up through the many other collections

reprinted by W. C. Hazlitt in the series *Shakespeare Jest Books* and *Old English Jest Books*, he will be struck by the following generalization: the "jest" before Joe Miller is a considerably different art-form from the "joke" as we know it.

Most of these early "jests" are much longer and they have no "punch line." They are simple abbreviated *novellas* in a merry vein. They describe some escapade, or ruse, or a bit of clever deceit, often for some reason perpetrated by a woman on her husband. Their rich source is in Boccaccio, though more immediately in the *Facetiae* of Poggio.

Even when they describe a piece of witticism, they are apt to handle it in a totally different way. For example:

*Of hym that fell of a tre and brake his rybbe**

There was a husbende man whiche, on a tyme, as he clymbed a tree to gette downe the frute, felle and brake a rybbe in his syde. To comferte hym there came a very merye man whiche, as they talked to gether sayde, he wolde teache hym suche a rule that, if he wold folowe it, he shuld never falle from tree more. Marye, sayde the hurte man, I wolde ye hadde taught me that rule before I felle: never the less, bycause it may happe to profyte me in tyme to come, lette me here what it is. Then the other sayde: Take hede, that thou go never downe faster than thou wentest up, but dis-cende as softly as thou clymmest up; and so thou shal never fall.

By this tale ye may note, that abidyng and slownesse otherwile are good and commendable, specially in those thynges, wherein spede and hastines cause great hurte and damage. Seneca saythe: A sodayne thyng is nought.

In this particular story it is the garb in which the "wise-crack" is cast, the de-emphasizing of the "punch line" and the adding of a moral which clearly distinguishes it from what we call a "joke." However, most of these early "jests" have no "punch line" at all; they have, as we say, no "point." They are simply short short stories.

*This is number 30 of "Mery Tales, Wittie Questions and Quick Answers, Very pleasant to be Readde." (1567) Reprinted in Volume 3 of the "Shakespeare Jest-Books," London: Willis and Sotheran, 1864. Series edited by W. Carew Hazlitt.

Perhaps what Richard Porson might have been able to show was: that the joke, as we know it today, was transmitted to us in large measure by way of the "facetiae" of Hierocles and Philagrius (compilers of the *Philogelos*), that this form sometime around 1700 began to drive out of popularity the "jest" of the *Shakespeare Jest Book* variety and that the book of Joe Miller marks (in English literature) this change-over. Needless to say, today the revolution is complete.

SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

THE BEST AND MOST RECENT edition of the collection was published in Berlin in 1869 by Alfred Eberhard (*Philogelos, Hieroclis et Philagrii Facetiae*. Berlin: Ebeling & Plahn.)* It consists of 264 jokes, a very few appearing twice. Eberhard's work is based largely upon three manuscripts, known as A. M. and V. V (Vindobonensis) is of the 15th century and contains 68 jokes. M (Monacensis) is also of the 15th century and consists of 125 jokes. The largest collection, A, with 258 jokes, is not only the most complete but the most exasperating and elusive of Eberhard's three major sources. It is an apograph made in the robber-baron days of scholarship by a man with the name of Minoides Minas. Of Minoides Minas, Eberhard has this to say (p. 58):

"He was a Greek who was famous for the number of books he discovered, destroyed, stole, and concealed. He openly rifled the libraries of Greece and Asia, and copied off these jokes from some manuscript or other; whereupon he proceeded to hide all traces of what anybody would want to know about them."

Boissonade, noted French classical scholar and contemporary of Minas, published an edition of this joke-book in Paris in 1848 using Minas' apograph. Twenty years later Eberhard, who was hoping to put out a complete and scholarly edition, made every effort to see the apograph. But his repeated letters to two Parisian scholars got no reply; so he was forced to use Boissonade's Text for A. Basing his work largely on careful comparison of these

*The numbering of the jokes in this monograph follows that of Eberhard. Translations are mine.

sources, together with some early editions which stemmed from an independent source, Eberhard finally edited his *Philogelos*.

The *Philogelos*, as we have it, is really not one joke book, but two. It seems to have been compiled from previous collections made by two different men: Hierocles and Philagrius. Codex A and M mention both names. V mentions only Hierocles; but it is possible that Philagrius' name dropped out of V, as Eberhard suggests, because Hierocles' name appeared first and because most of the jokes were his. Further evidence that we have here two joke books, not one, lies in the fact that some of the jokes appear twice, in slightly different wording and yet never more than twice. From two separate joke books then, those of Hierocles and Philagrius, somebody appears to have made a new collection. Who he was we do not know, nor do we know what other sources he may have used nor the titles of the two original joke books. This anonymous compiler probably provided the title *Philogelos*.

Before the discovery of codices A, M, and V, 28 of these jokes were known to exist. They were found appended to a tenth century manuscript of Hierocles' work, the *Commentary on the Golden Words of Pythagoras*. The ascription of the jokes to the philosopher Hierocles was at first not seriously questioned and in 1605 Marquand Freher edited both works together. For the next one hundred and fifty years, these 28 jokes achieved a wide popularity; so that Johann Adam Schier, whose edition appeared in 1750, was able to list an Index of Principal Editions which had appeared before him. Schier lists seven leading ones, implying there were many others. By this time, this collection of "asteia" or "facetiae" was being printed separately and for its own sake for the light-minded and at the same time kept appearing as a reluctant and bizarre appendage to the Golden Words of Pythagoras. In view of the subject matter of these jokes there is a delicate, though purely accidental, irony involved.

Needham, for example, who rejected the ascription of the asteia to the Hierocles of the Commentary, nevertheless printed the jokes as a sort of appendix, after apologizing as follows: (Peter Needham, *Hieroclis Philosophi Alexandrini Commentarius in Aurea Carmina*. Cambridge, Eng.: A. & J. Churchill, 1709, p. 459).

"Since there happened to be a few empty pages, and so that nothing might be omitted from my edition, nothing which bore the name of Hierocles, I decided to add these facetiae, as they are called; even though their frivolous themes, and an occasional expression only found in later Greek, lead us to assume that they should not be ascribed to Hierocles, the Alexandrian."

In the *Gentleman's Magazine* for September 1741 (xi. 477-9) when Samuel Johnson was a contributor, there appears an interesting article entitled "The Jests of Hierocles." A footnote to the caption reads: "The author of the celebrated Comment on Pythagoras." The article opens with an apology directed to the editor:

"... if you should be censured for inserting any Thing of so little Importance, you may allege, that they have been thought worthy to be preserv'd for many Ages; (and) that they were ascribed to no meaner an Author than Hierocles..." Twenty-one of the 28 facetiae are then given in broad English adaptation, a version which is generously padded, and which often takes the surprise out of the "punch line." The omissions are no doubt due to textual difficulties and moral restraints.

So, for over 150 years these 28 *asteia* circulated about Europe. Not until 1768 was the number enlarged, when Rhoer published 66 jokes based on the 68 which had been discovered in Codex V. Shortly afterwards, the existence of the Augustan Codex (later called *Monacensis*) with 125 jokes was noted by Pontanus who proceeded to publish 109 of them with Latin translations. That was all, until Minoides Minas ransacked the libraries of Greece and Asia, and became "famous for the number of books he discovered, destroyed, stole and concealed" among which was presumably Codex A with 258 facetiae, which Boissonade proceeded to publish in 1848.

Who were Hierocles and Philagrius? It is hard to make out anything for certain here. The first 28 stories were found in conjunction with Hierocles' *Commentary on the Golden Words of Pythagoras*. This particular Hierocles had long been equated with the 5th Century A. D. Neoplatonist. However, Praechter (Karl Praechter, *Hierokles der Stoiker*. Leipzig: Dieterich'sche Verlag-Buchhandlung, 1901) identified the writer of the Commentary with a Stoic philosopher,

a contemporary of Epictetus. Arnim and Schubart (H. von Arnim u. W. Schubart, *Hierokles Ethische Elementarlehre, papyrus 9780*. Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1906) published a 2nd Century papyrus of ethical fragments which strongly corroborates Praechter.

Whether the philosopher Hierocles is 5th or 1st century, Neoplatonist or Stoic, most later authorities seem agreed that the writer of the Commentary is not the writer of the facetiae. The vocabulary, phraseology and grammatical constructions of the two are quite different. However, the evidence against is as weak as the evidence in favor; since jokes by their nature lend themselves readily to revision and adaptation and since these jokes are in the "dress" of the 9th and 10th Centuries, though many are clearly pagan in origin. For the same reasons it has been impossible to equate Philagrius with any of the dozen or more persons of that name known to us from classical antiquity. Somehow, at any rate, the name Hierocles got attached to a collection of stories, and Philagrius to another.

The lively interest in these *asteia* suddenly collapsed. Ironically enough, this took place almost immediately after the appearance of the fullest and finest edition, Eberhard's, in 1869, with his 264 stories. After this, there is little to add to the Record. In 1920 Charles Clinch Bubb (Chas. Clinch Bubb, *The Jests of Hierocles and Philagrius*; newly tr. from the Greek. Cleveland: The Rowfant Club, 1920)* made an English translation, based upon the Eberhard edition. Only 125 copies were printed. Thus quietly faded out one of the most significant collections in the history of Wit and Humor.

*A facsimile copy of this publication is in the San Francisco Public Library, part of SCOWAH, in addition to many of the old English jest books, the Shakespeare jest books, the Joe Miller jest books, and the Facetiae of Poggio referred to in this treatise. (See A. S. No. 2, Notes 4 and 6.)

APPENDIX

(Selections from *Greek Wit*, F. A. Paley, 1830-1.)

1. Philip the Great, in passing sentence on two rogues, ordered one of them to leave Macedonia with all speed, and the other to try and catch him.
2. Some one plucked the feathers from a nightingale, and finding it a very small bird, exclaimed, "You little wretch, you're nothing but *voice!*"
3. Diogenes used to say, that many persons make beasts of themselves in order to destroy their lives, and yet desire to be embalmed in order to preserve their dead bodies.
4. A thief excused himself to Demosthenes by saying, "I did not know it was yours." "But you did know," said the other, "that it was not yours."
5. Simonides used to say, "He never once regretted having held his tongue, but very often he had felt sorry for having spoken."
6. Zeno said to a youth who was more disposed to talk than to listen, "Young man, nature gave us one tongue but two ears, that we may hear just twice as much as we speak."
7. Bion the sophist, seeing an envious man looking very downcast, remarked, "Either some great harm has happened to him, or some great luck to his neighbour."
8. Socrates used to say, the best form of government was that in which the people obey the rulers, and the rulers obey the laws.
9. Cato, on observing that statues were being set up in honour of many, remarked, "I would rather people would ask, why is there *not* a statue to Cato, than why there *is*."
10. Thearidas, while whetting a sword, was asked if it was sharp. "As sharp as slander," he replied.
11. Agesilaus, being asked whether he thought justice or bravery the greater virtue, answered: "There would be no need of bravery if we all of us were just."

12. Demonax was once heard to say to a lawyer, "Probably all laws are really useless, for good men do not want laws at all, and bad men are made no better by them."
13. Agesilaus, when some one asked what things boys ought to learn, replied, "What will be useful to them when they are men."
14. Archytas used to say, "It is as hard to find a man without guile, as a fish without a backbone."
15. Bion said of a rich man who was stingy, "It is not he that possesses the property, but the property that possesses him."
16. When someone asked Diogenes the proper time for breakfasting, he replied, "If you are rich, whenever you choose; if you are poor, whenever you have anything to breakfast upon."
17. Chilon being asked what were the most difficult things, replied, "To keep secrets, to make a good use of leisure, and to bear being wronged."
18. Socrates being asked whether it were better to marry or not to marry, replied, "Whichever you do, you will regret it."
19. Pausanias the son of Pleistoanax was asked why the Spartans never repealed any of their ancient laws. "Because," he replied, "laws have authority over men, not men over laws."
20. Some one, in anger at a discussion, gave Socrates a kick. When surprise was expressed at his bearing it patiently, he said, "If an ass had kicked me, should I have brought it before the magistrate?"
21. Phocion compared the talk of Leosthenes to a cypress tree, —tall, and big, but without fruit.
22. Some one asked Diogenes at what time of life he had best marry. "If you are young," he replied, "*not yet*; if you are old, *never*."
23. Zeno used to say that it was more serious to make a slip with the tongue than with the foot.
24. Cleanthes, on being taunted with being too cautious, replied, "That is why I make so few mistakes."
25. When his friends said to Diogenes, "You are old; do relax a little;" he answered, "If I had run the long course in a race, would you have said, 'Do slack your pace a little at the end?'"

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